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ABSTRACT

This digest outlines salient characteristics of teacher-led research and its benefits to teachers and students. A discussion of selected resources for teacher researchers, which are available through various components of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), follows the overview. Effective teacher research is an empowering professional development activity that can assist teachers in several ways: (1) it empowers teachers, giving them greater confidence in their ability to individually and collectively promote change; (2) it develops and improves intellectual and technical skills; and (3) it expands career opportunities. Because teacher research is typically driven by a teacher's desire to improve his or her practice, and because it is focused on a specific problem, students generally reap immediate benefits from the teacher's findings. ERIC can assist teacher researchers to plan, implement, and disseminate their research. Specific ERIC resources that may be particularly useful include the ERIC database, the AskERIC Virtual Library and other Internet-based resources, ERIC publications, and subject-specific ERIC clearinghouses. Examples of information from some of these specific resources found within the ERIC system are given, and contact information for identified resources is included. (Contains 16 references.) (IAH)

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ERIC AS A RESOURCE FOR THE TEACHER RESEARCHER

ERIC DIGEST March 1995

by

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ERIC as a Resource for the Teacher Researcher

Ismat Abdal-Haqq

This digest outlines salient characteristics of teacher-led research and its benefits. This overview is followed by discussion of selected resources for teacher researchers, which are available through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).

What Is Teacher Research?

Several terms for teacher research are encountered in education literature, including: action research, practitioner research, teacher-as-scholar, practical inquiry, interactive research, classroom inquiry, and practice-centered inquiry (Downhower, Melvin, & Sizemore, 1990; Williamson, 1992). Although these terms may not be completely interchangeable, a common thread running through various conceptions of teacher research is that the teacher is an active constructor of knowledge rather than a passive consumer of it (Miller & Pine, 1990; Williamson, 1992). In recent literature, action research appears to be the most common designation of this kind of research, perhaps, because it suggests most vividly both the inherent empowering quality of the process and the immediacy and concreteness of its outcomes (McKay, 1992; Miller & Pine, 1990). The remaining discussion about teacher research refers primarily to inquiry that reflects action research principles.

McCutcheon and Jung (1990) identify the core components of action research as systematic inquiry, reflexivity, and focus on the practical. It seeks to answer questions and solve problems that arise from the daily life of the classroom and to put findings into immediate practice (McKay, 1992; Twine & Martinek, 1992). Teacher researchers may work alone or collaboratively with other teachers, student teachers, or university researchers.

Systematic inquiry is the hallmark of effective teacher research (Shalaway, 1990). A variety of techniques and approaches are employed, including: experimental designs, systematic observation, descriptive research, and ethnographic/case studies (Wessinger, 1992; Eisenhart & Borko, 1993; Neubert, 1989; Downhower et al., 1990).

McKay (1992) describes action research as a six-step cyclical process: (1) identifying an issue or problem to study; (2) gathering and reviewing related information; (3) developing a plan of action; (4) implementing the plan; (5) evaluating results; and (6) repeating the cycle with a revised problem or strategy derived from what was learned in the first cycle, until the question is answered.

Benefits of Teacher Research

Effective teacher research empowers teachers, giving them greater confidence in their ability to individually and collectively promote change (Downhower et al., 1990; Nihlen, 1992). In addition to developing new intellectual and technical skills, conducting research often creates new career opportunities and roles for classroom teachers: e.g., writers, college instructors, teacher leaders (Shalaway, 1990). Downhower et al. (1990) and Nihlen (1992) indicate that teacher researchers become more critical and responsive readers and users of research.

Miller and Pine (1990) suggest that when teachers become agents of inquiry, the locus of knowledge about teaching shifts from sources external to the classroom (e.g., researchers, textbook publishers, administrators) to sources of practical classroom experience (i.e., teachers). This shift enhances the professional status of teaching because teachers, through this knowledge-construction, actively help to shape the knowledge base of their own profession (Johnson, 1993). Generally, teacher research is driven by the practitioner's desire to improve his or her own practice with respect to a specific problem and a specific set of students. Thus, students reap immediate benefits from the teacher's learning (Shalaway, 1990; Williamson, 1992).

Using ERIC To Plan, Implement, & Disseminate Teacher Research

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) can assist teacher researchers, at various stages of the systematic inquiry process, to access the "strong knowledge base" and "multifaceted support system" that Neubert (1989, p. 9) asserts are needed to sustain research activity among classroom teachers. Systematic inquiry includes gathering and reviewing information on the question to be investigated. ERIC provides unmatched access to education literature and related resources, which can be accessed through a variety of media: print, microfiche, CD-ROM, commercial online services, and electronic networks such as the Internet.

Neubert (1989) includes publication of findings among the external support mechanisms that help to sustain teachers' enthusiasm for doing research because publication helps to validate the teacher's contribution to the professional knowledge base. ERIC supports teacher researchers' efforts to disseminate their work by: (1) abstracting and indexing journal articles and documents, which they submit, for the ERIC database; (2) making available paper copies and full-text versions of most articles and documents; and (3) providing assistance in locating print and electronic journals, as well as listservs and other electronic resources, that publish material related to teachers' areas of study. *[Contact ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC for information on these services.]*

ERIC Resources & Where To Find Them

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a nationwide information network, which has been funded by the federal government since the mid-1960s (Stonehill & Brandhorst, 1992). The system consists of 16 subject area clearinghouses, a number of adjunct clearinghouses, and 4 support components. *[For contact information on all clearinghouses and other components, contact ACCESS ERIC: 1-800-LET ERIC.]*

The ERIC database, the hub of the system, is the world's largest education-related database. It contains more than 800,000 abstracts of journal articles and documents such as research reports, conference papers,

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teaching guides, and nonprint media. The ERIC clearinghouses and adjunct clearinghouses collect, abstract, index, and catalog literature related to their specific scope areas (e.g., teaching and teacher education, assessment and evaluation, urban education, information and technology). The clearinghouses also publish bibliographies, monographs, and digests; perform customized searches of the database; and respond to scope-related inquiries.

Most university libraries, some public libraries, some school districts, and ERIC clearinghouses provide access to searchable print, CD-ROM, or online versions of the ERIC database. At present, there are also several Internet access points for the database. Paper copies of journal articles and documents are available. Full-text versions of approximately 95% of the documents are available on microfiche at more than 900 locations (Educational Resources Information Center [ERIC], 1994).

The Office of Educational Research and Information operates an Internet gopher site that provides direct access to a range of online ERIC resources and pointers to free online access to the database. AskERIC is an Internet-based information provider that offers individualized responses to education-related questions within 48 hours and maintains a free electronic library. The AskERIC Virtual Library is an FTP/gopher site that offers lesson plans; more than 1,000 2-page research syntheses (digests) on current topics; prepared ERIC searches on current topics; resource guides; archives of some education-related listservs; government information; remote access to library catalogs; and access to other gopher sites (ERIC, 1994).

The teacher researcher who consults ERIC resources might find journal articles that provide (1) a step-by-step account of how a practitioner carried out an action research project (Downhower et al., 1990); (2) strategies and resources for locating information on a particular topic (Keeney & Sunnarborg, 1992); (3) the location of teacher researcher support groups (Shalaway, 1990); and (4) a guide to basic data analysis for beginning researchers (Culkin & Davis, 1992). Internet-based ERIC resources can lead the teacher researcher to listservs for teachers; such as XTAR *[contact information given below]*, a network for teacher researchers and others who want to share information on teacher research in general (B. Blanton, personal communication, October 6, 1994). Another valuable Internet-based ERIC resource for teacher researchers is the Test Locator—a searchable file, which can be used to locate data collection and evaluation instruments—on the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation's gopher.

Contact Information

All ERIC clearinghouses and components can be contacted by mail, phone (toll-free numbers), fax, and e-mail. ACCESS ERIC can provide specific contact information and referrals to appropriate components of the system. Listed below is contact information for some of the resources mentioned in this digest.

ACCESS ERIC: phone: 1-800-LET-ERIC
e-mail: acceric@inet.ed.gov

AskERIC: phone: 1-800-464-9107
e-mail: askeric@ericir.syr.edu

Test Locator: phone: 1-800-464-3742
e-mail: eric_ae@cua.edu

XTAR
e-mail: blantonwe@conrad.appstate.edu
or gwells@oise.on.ca

References

References identified with an EJ or ED number have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. References followed by an SP number were being processed at the time of publication. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; most documents (ED) are available in microfiche collections at more than 900 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC.

Culkin, D., & Davis, H. (1992). Basic data analysis for nonresearchers. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 63*(9), 32-35. EJ461928

Downhower, S., Melvin, M. P., & Sizemore, P. (1990). Improving writing instruction through teacher action research. *Journal of Staff Development, 11*(3), 22-27. EJ430614

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Neubert, G. A. (1989). Supporting teacher research. *Teacher Educator, 25*(1) 2-9. EJ407848

Nihlen, A. S. (1992, April). *Schools as centers for reflection and inquiry: Research for teacher empowerment*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. ED354584

Shalaway, L. (1990). Tap into teacher research. *Instructor, 100*(1) 34-38. EJ417470

Stonehill, R. M., & Brandhorst, T. (1992). The three phases of ERIC. *Educational Researcher 21*(3), 18-21. EJ445360

Twine, J., & Martinek, T. J. (1992). Teachers as researchers—An application of a collaborative action research model. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 63*(9), 22-25. EJ461928

Wessinger, N. P. (1992). Demystifying research for the practitioner—How do I find out what I want to know? *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 63*(9), 12-16. EJ461928

Williamson, K. M. (1992). Relevance or rigor—A case for teacher as researcher. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 63*(9), 17-21. EJ461928

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ERIC **Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a nationwide information system initiated in 1966. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. ERIC is the largest and most frequently used education database in the world.**